STORM CLOUDS OVER BEULAH LAND

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Students of the American Holiness tradition will be familiar with the paper war which erupted in the 1850s between Hiram Mattison and the supporters of Phoebe Palmer over her presentation of the doctrine of entire sanctification. To date, however, the historians of the movement have ignored the role which Randolph Sinks Foster, pastor, educator, and future Methodist Episcopal bishop, played in this controversy. This is indeed unfortunate, since without a proper understanding of Foster's role in the debate, it is difficult to understand the intensity of Palmer's response to Mattison at the outset of the conflict. Indeed, as we will show, the early years of the debate have all but escaped scholarly attention, while Palmer's personal response to Mattison's initial critique is missing from her standard biographies. The present article then is an attempt to correct this oversight and in the process to provide the wider context in which the Mattison-Palmer controversy was played out.

Who was Randolph Foster that his opinions on the "grand depositum" of Methodism should command the attention of Phoebe Palmer? Foster was born on February 22, 1820, in the Clermont County jail (his father was the jail keeper) in Williamsburg, Ohio. While he was still a youth, his parents, Israel and Polly (Kain) Foster, moved the family to Kentucky. Soon after, Foster entered Augusta College, in Kentucky, the earliest Methodist college west of the mountains, "where a little faculty, headed by the versatile Martin Ruter, and numbering such future leaders as John P. Durbin and Henry B. Bascom, was trying to light a torch for the sons of the pioneers."

1 Randolph Foster's name does not appear in any connection in the pages of Richard Wheatley's The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer (New York: Palmer & Hughes, 1884), whereas her controversy with Hiram Mattison runs throughout (cf. 93ff, 112-3, 115-7, 131, 311, 342, 495, 553). Charles White, while acknowledging that Mattison wrote articles against Palmer, cites only those which appeared in the pages of the New York Christian Advocate and Journal. Charles Edward White, The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer As Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 53, 245-6. To his credit, Raser is aware of the existence of the articles published in the Northern Christian Advocate; however, it is also clear that he is unaware of their content since he maintains that Palmer did not respond directly to Mattison's attacks until November 15, 1855. Harold E. Raser, Phoebe Palmer: Her Life and Thought (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987). All three sources downplay the extent of the earlier controversy, despite the fact that Palmer herself saw it as inflicting "far reaching harm" (Wheatley, 552), and none of the above sources mention Palmer's stinging attack on Foster, which will be discussed shortly.

2 James Richard Joy, ed., The Teachers of Drew 1867-1942: A Commemorative Volume Issued on the Occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the Founding of Drew Theological Seminary, October 15, 1942 (Madison, NJ: Drew University, 1942), 45. Joy points out that Foster's grandfather, while adventuring into Kentucky from Virginia, had been killed by the Indians in that 'dark and bloody ground.'
It is often mentioned by his biographers that “unwise friends” advised him to leave college during his sophomore year, but, while we do not doubt that this was the case, it is also true that he needed very little encouragement in this direction. Indeed, at age seventeen he “found more satisfaction in preaching up and down the countryside than in listening to lectures on theology or Greek literature and mathematics.” As a result, he left Augusta and went to the September session of the Ohio Conference in 1837 to seek admission on trial, at which time he was appointed as a junior preacher of the Charleston circuit and began riding throughout the Ohio Valley.

In July 1840 he married Sarah A. Miley of Cincinnati, of whom little is said outside of noting her passing in 1871—the year before her husband was elected bishop. During the following years, Foster began to realize that he had made a mistake in leaving college, and to make up for this he applied every means of education within his reach. Slowly, but steadily, he gained a reputation as an inspiring preacher. It is generally admitted, however, that much of the effect of his preaching was due to his commanding personal appearance. Foster was long and slender, and his erect posture along with his piercing eyes, his sullen countenance, and his thick hair and beard (which did not thin with age although it did turn pure “iron-grey”), combined to make a powerful impression before he had uttered a word. However, it is owing to his pen, rather than his personal appearance, that Randolph Foster would make his presence felt among the Methodists.

Foster’s first literary endeavor was born more out of necessity than from any desire on his part for a career in writing. Foster was only twenty-nine at the time and was pastor at Wesley Chapel in Cincinnati. The struggle between Calvinism and Arminianism was at its height in that section of the country, largely because of a Presbyterian minister, Nathan Lewis Rice, who had recently authored a work which dealt with the doctrines of election and free grace in a challenging way. Forty-one years old at the time, Rice was a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary (in 1830) and pastor of the Central Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati. A perusal of the literature on Rice indicates that he made a career out of agitation. Clearly Foster felt that the book and its claims were serious

3 Ibid.
5 Of all the articles written on Foster’s life, only Earl and Godbold mention Sarah Foster, and even they allow her only one line [868].
enough to warrant his attention even though the demands on his time were perhaps greater than any other time in his career. As Foster tells us:

The book was prepared amid the numerous and weighty labors of a large pastoral charge, and that when ordinary duties were greatly exceeded by a season of unparalleled affliction—during the prevalence of the cholera—at a time when, from day to day and week to week, the author was ministering to many of those who were dying with that most dreaded scourge, and when his own life, as the life of all, seemed uncertain from hour to hour.

Rice's book called for a response, and although he was reluctant to do so, Foster took on his learned Calvinist colleague through a series of letters published in the *Western Christian Advocate*, of which Matthew Simpson was then editor.

The object of Foster's response was

*simply to present a statement of Calvinism, and objections thereto— not to examine its defense— not to build up an opposite system— not to contrast it with other schemes— simply to state it, and deduce its consequences— believing that these consequences are sufficient to overthrow and destroy it.*

In pursuing this simple presentation, Foster quotes at length from the accepted creeds and commentaries of the Calvinist faith so that the reader will have a clear understanding of the exact positions to which he is responding. What is more, in the 1860 edition Foster includes an appendix in which he prints Rice's response to his critiques as well as his rejoinders to Rice. The work is polemic at times, but Foster is careful to point out that the Calvinists are fellow laborers in the Lord's field and that Calvinism "despite her errors, . . . has many surpassing excellences—many which my own Church may well and wisely emulate."

To be sure, Calvinism did not wither and die from this westerner's attacks, but among his peers Foster was hailed far and wide as the champion of the Wesleyan faith. "His stature loomed so high that he had invitations from Atlantic seaboard churches, and was soon preaching to the principal congregations of New York, and associating on equal terms with the leaders of Methodism." Of particular interest to the present study

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8Foster's reluctance to respond to Rice was also due to the fact that for quite some time "peace and Christian union" had prevailed and he had hopes that the storm created by Rice would blow over. However, silence "only seemed to whet the envenomed appetite of an adversary who seemed intent to devour us. The greater our reluctance, the greater his ferocity."
10Indeed, the volume and repetition of sources is at times carried to the point of distraction.
11*Ibid.*, 16. Foster also informs his readers that many of his "personal friends and relatives" are Calvinists and he greatly admired the theological and scientific works of Charles Hodge and James McCosh.
12Joy, 46.
is Foster's pastorate at New York City's fashionable Mulberry Street Church between 1850 and 1852. Here he developed a special friendship with the multi-millionaire industrialist Daniel Drew, whose generosity would culminate in the founding of Drew Theological Seminary, of which Foster was both a professor (1868–73) and president (1870–73).

Of present interest is the fact that upon his arrival in his new pulpit, Foster delivered a series of sermons which, when published the following year, were destined to become his most popular and enduring work—*Nature and Blessedness of Christian Purity* (1851). Foster's efforts in favor of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection helped to revive the emphasis on holiness within the American wing of Methodism and beyond her borders. Foster himself had entered into the experience of entire sanctification just prior to moving to New York, the particulars of which are given in a narrative published in the *Guide to Holiness*. In this narrative, Foster reveals that he had been a professed believer in the doctrine of holiness as taught by the Methodist Episcopal Church for a number of years and that he had often attempted to attain this state, but had always failed. Eventually, writes Foster, “because of indiscretions in the lives and language of some who professed it, and from heresies in the instructions of some who taught it . . . I could have no patience to hear the subject introduced.” Candidly, Foster admits that he was “not against holiness itself, but against its profession, and particularly by myself,” commenting to a friend who he believed enjoyed the blessing herself, that “if my enjoyment of it requires a profession, I do not desire it. I do not feel that I could receive it on such terms, or with such involvements.” Eventually, he passed through a period of “many powerful temptations” which left him “completely wretched.” Deliverance came at a lovefeast conducted at the New Street Church in Cincinnati (a black congregation) where, “under the exercises of these simple, ignorant Christians,” writes Foster, “I was wonderfully blessed . . . This was great, timely, and permanent blessing.” Foster had been divinely revived, but the work was not yet completed. Indeed, shortly after this experience, Foster was severely attacked with disease and brought very near to death. In his weakened state, Foster once again began “to pant for holiness” even though not all of his prejudices were gone.

Having sufficiently recovered both spiritually and physically, Foster commenced preparation for a protracted meeting to be held in his charge through December and January of 1849/50. While many were revived and

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14 Ibid., 82.
15 Ibid., 83, emphasis in original.
16 Ibid., 83, emphasis in original.
17 Foster may have contracted cholera, since an epidemic of that disease was devastating Cincinnati at that time.
converted, none was more deeply affected than Foster himself. In his own words:

Holiness to the Lord was presented to my mind. I saw, I felt that it was attainable; that it was possible to me... But now the controversy was in my will... It was a deliberate choice; a choice that Christ should purify my heart, and a firm belief that this was all that was necessary, that if I would consent, he would do it... A deep, immovable calm took possession of my heart. I have been happy a thousand times, but my present exercise was new and strange. It was rest, rest in God... The witness had not indeed been given in the measure or mode anticipated, but a witness was given... I felt the truth of the witness; it was so; I was conscious of it, as conscious as I had ever been of my conversion. A change had been wrought in my heart, a radical, conscious change. I was not only peculiarly exercised, but I was changed... I am now enabled to consecrate myself, may I say fully? to Christ, to be his. 18

With regard to Foster's testimony and its relationship to his imminent controversy with Phoebe Palmer, it is worth noting that, despite Timothy Smith's assertions to the contrary, there is no evidence that Foster sought Palmer's advice on the experience of entire sanctification. 19 Indeed, it was Palmer's type of presentation, with its insistence on claiming the experience of perfect love, and publicly professing its attainment, before one had received a clear witness to its bestowal, that almost soured Foster to the doctrine altogether. As we shall see, Foster never abandoned his distaste for this "shorter way" of obtaining Christian purity.

Shortly after the events detailed above, Foster found himself called to the pastorate of New York City's fashionable Mulberry Street Church. Whether out of the fullness of his new experience or out of pastoral concern to promote the doctrine and correct certain errors associated with its presentation, Foster immediately delivered a series of sermons on Christian perfection. The essence of these sermons was published the following year under the title The Nature and Blessedness of Christian Purity.

New York City was Palmer's home and main area of ministry, and knowing as he must, that the Mulberry Street Church had been instrumental in the establishment and promotion of the Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness, 20 Foster must have anticipated that his messages, setting forth a "longer way" as an alternate view, would stir controversy. Indeed, the cry was soon heard from many quarters, "Foster is making war upon sister Palmer!" 21 However, as the pages of Christian Purity

18 Ibid., 84–86, emphasis his.
20 Indeed, the Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness began as two "female prayer meetings," one at the Allen Street Church and the other at Mulberry Street, mutually agreed to meet together in the Palmers' home. See Wheatley, 238.
reveal, Foster was more preoccupied with the promotion of Christian purity than with polemics against Palmer.22

As he had with his first book, Foster did his homework well, as citations from the works of Wesley, Watson, Clarke, Merritt, Mahan, Wise, and Peck abound.23 Following Wesley, Foster posited perfect love of God and one's fellows as the essence of true Christianity and thought of salvation as a journey from willful rebellion to perfect love.24 The love of God being shed abroad in one's heart was through the ministration of the Holy Spirit during the process of sanctification. Accordingly, sanctification was viewed as a process, begun at the point where the individual soul became converted, leading to a crisis, wherein the soul became entirely sanctified (i.e., perfected in love), after which the individual continued to grow in grace. As Peters points out,

The 'old Methodist doctrine,' the 'proper Methodist testimony,' became the declaration that Christian perfection might be entered into by a work of divine grace called 'entire sanctification' and available 'now and by simple faith.' Wesley held that to fail to emphasize this possibility of the immediate reception of such an experience was effectively to cut the nerve of any real expectation of it. To delete the instantaneous was to cancel the gradual as well.25

By way of background, this Methodist distinctive almost died from neglect in America during the early nineteenth century. Part of the reason for its neglect was due to the fact that perfection, as Wesley had presented it, called for a sacramental setting unknown and alien to the American frontier.26 However, by the 1840s, great changes were occurring—the doctrine of holiness was being revived. Interestingly, two of the main figures in the revival, Charles Finney and Asa Mahan, were not theologically affiliated with Methodism but with the Presbyterian-Congregational tradition. Their backgrounds led them to stress divine intervention in their

22Foster does not mention Palmer by name, even though anyone who was familiar with her altar theology would readily identify her teachings within his critique.
23Foster quoted extensively from Wesley's "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, as Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. Wesley, from the year 1725, to the year 1777" (See Wesley's Works, XI, 371ff). In addition, the following works are cited by Foster: George Peck, The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection Stated and Defended (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1845), 74, 113; Adam Clarke, Entire Sanctification (Baltimore: Armstrong & Berry, 1838), 69; Timothy Merritt, The Christian's Manual: A Treatise on Christian Perfection (New York: Bangs & Emory, 1825), 136; Daniel Wise, The Path of Life (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), 219.
25John Leland Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 182-183. Indeed, Wesley emphasized these points in a letter to his brother Charles: "O insist everywhere on full redemption, receivable by faith alone! Consequently to be looked for now. You are made, as it were, for this very thing, ... Press the instantaneous blessing; then I shall have more time for my peculiar calling, enforcing the gradual work" (183).
26Peters, 188.
presentation of Christian perfection, and consequently, the instantaneous virtually eclipsed the gradual.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, revivalism with its stress on repentance as the “immediate duty” of every sinner, coupled with American pragmatism, led to an impatient “I want it now” attitude.\textsuperscript{28}

This stress on the immediate led to a controversy within Methodism—a controversy which is clearly visible in the pages of Foster’s \textit{Nature and Blessedness of Christian Purity}. As noted above, Foster was troubled by those who were \textit{claiming} by faith the experience of entire sanctification, and testifying to their attainment of this blessed state, without having any evidence, internally or externally, as to its actually being bestowed upon them. This “shorter way” to holiness was championed by Phoebe Palmer, who drew on the sacrificial imagery in the New Testament in developing her “altar theology” which stressed the self-sacrifice of the individual. That Foster rejected Palmer’s presentation of sanctification is clear in the following from the 1851 edition of \textit{Christian Purity}:

\begin{quote}
In this connexion there is, in our estimation, unfortunate and injurious advice sometimes given, in some such language as the following:—’Bring your all and lay it on God’s altar; believe it is accepted; and though you may have no direct witness, no special sensible change, do not doubt but it is done; the altar sanctifieth the gift; whatsoever toucheth the altar is holy,’—and much more of this kind. I must believe that such instructions tend to delusion, and have been the fruitful source of many spurious, though sincere professions. It is well, nay, it is indispensable, to make an entire surrender of all to God; and when this is done, God will acknowledge it, by sending the witness of his acceptance; but let no one, at his peril, conclude that he has made this surrender, and is consequently sanctified, without the requisite witness: he will only deceive himself, and receive no benefit. . . . Until the witness comes, we will not say we are sanctified, we will not even believe we are; we will look to be, and wait in expectation until we are, and then we will rest in God.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Foster’s comments did not go unnoticed, and, when in October of 1851, Hiram Mattison began a series of articles on entire sanctification for the \textit{Northern Christian Advocate} which were critical of her

\textsuperscript{27}Peters, 189. To be sure, Finney and Mahan may be classified as Arminian Calvinists since they stressed one’s will more than traditional Calvinists.

\textsuperscript{28}Melvin Easterday Dieter, \textit{The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century} (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press), 18, 31.

\textsuperscript{29}Randolph Sinks Foster, \textit{Nature and Blessedness of Christian Purity} (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), 129–30. This statement was retained intact in the revised and enlarged edition published in 1869. However, Foster appended the following to the last sentence: “—aye, [we] will rest while we wait—in the faith that it shall be done.” Perhaps this addendum is meant to underscore that he too believed that once the requisite conditions were met, entire sanctification had to follow. Randolph S. Foster, \textit{Christian Purity or the Heritage of Faith} (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1869), 206. Elsewhere in the same work Foster exclaims, “What a manifest absurdity! Making our sanctification to depend upon the belief of an untruth; namely, a belief that it is now wrought, in order that it may be wrought! This is a great delusion. It is not the doctrine of the Bible” (133).
position, Palmer seized the opportunity to respond. Wrongly assuming that Foster's *Christian Purity* had provided the basis for Mattison's attacks, Palmer published an open letter to Foster which appeared in the November 12th issue of the *Northern*. Such a move was uncharacteristic of Palmer, who usually avoided direct responses to her critics, and the tone of the letter demonstrates that Foster's comments were taken very personally.

Writes Palmer:

To Rev. R. S. Foster, Author of 'Christian Purity,' &c.: Dear Brother:—... Some professors of holiness, who have been overcoming in the ancient way, of which the Revelator speaks—'By the word of their testimony'—have recently been overcome of Satan, and are now in great perplexities. Their defeat has been accomplished by their being induced to withhold 'the word of their testimony.' In endeavoring to follow your advice, to 'live holiness, and let their lives take the place of their tongues and witness for them,' they have lost the blessing, and now find it impossible to live, that is, to exhibit in their lives, that which they do not possess. ... While they continued in the unwavering profession of their faith, and did not put asunder that which in ancient times were joined together—believing with the heart and confessing with the mouth—they found that the latter step, that is, confession with the mouth, was unto salvation—conscious salvation from all sin. Since they have adopted the newer theory, and let their lives take the place of their lips, their realizations of salvation are gone. By not having obeyed God, in holding fast the profession of their faith, condemnation has ensued, and an evil heart of unbelief, with its fearful accompaniments has returned. ... We need not say to Br. F. that these persons have a claim, or rather, an imperative demand on his sympathies. We crave that these advices come through a public medium for it is fitting that these perplexities be met from the source whence they originated.

30See Hiram Mattison, "Thoughts on Entire Sanctification," *Northern Christian Advocate*, Vol. XI (October 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; November 5, 12, 1851). All articles appeared on the cover pages. Mattison had become one of the publishers of the *Advocate* beginning August 6, 1851.

31In addition to the fact that Foster had preached against her teachings in her own home town, Palmer may have been further agitated by the fact that her close personal friend, Bishop Edmund Janes, had written the highly favorable introduction to Foster's volume. Palmer's consternation at this state of affairs may be reflected in some of her comments given in a letter to Janes and dated January 5th, 1852, in which Palmer complains about the assaults of Mattison. She writes: "As your name has been more freely used in this controversy, than the name of any other bishop, I have been endeavoring to ask the Lord in faith, to direct your attention to it, but I have learned that I am not to expect God to do through spiritual influences, that which ought to be done through a human instrumentality. Faith without works, is dead. Let this be the apology for my present work. I hoped that you had been induced, before now, to look at brother Mattison's articles, but on asking Dr. P., last night, he informed me you had not. Since which, my heart has been very heavy. Shall the names of our bishops be sounded through the length and breadth of the land, as men not favoring the profession of holiness? Does it signify much, that the attainment of holiness in the present life, is a distinguishing doctrine of our creed, if the profession, when attained, is not encouraged?" It is worth noting that Mattison had never mentioned Janes in any of his articles and therefore the most likely reason for Janes' name being "freely used in this controversy" is due to his introduction to Foster's increasingly popular work.

For his part, Foster apparently declined to attack Palmer directly, nor did he offer advice to those who he clearly believed were doing the proper thing by refusing to testify to an experience for which they had no clear witness. Mattison, however, would continue to trouble the waters for several months in the pages of the *Northern Christian Advocate* before embarking on his more celebrated literary offensive in the latter part of the decade, but the ripples of this earlier exchange extended beyond the borders of this journal. For example, even though Timothy Merritt had been in agreement with Foster in his treatment of sanctification in general, and this controversy in particular, the magazine which he founded, *Guide to Holiness*, does not contain a review of Foster’s work. And this despite the fact that Foster’s narrative of his own experience of entire sanctification had been proudly published less than a year before. To be sure, in its early years the *Guide* did very few reviews. However, one might have expected some mention of this important work, or the controversy surrounding it, especially since Phoebe Palmer had been intimately associated with the periodical since its inception in 1839.

Furthermore, of all the topics covered in Foster’s work, the one which the *New York Christian Advocate and Journal* seized upon for particular note was his critique of the “Altar Theology,” saying,

We mean that which refers to hasty and loud profession of the grace of sanctification. We have long thought that a mistaken view which urged it—which kept the soul in a state of continual tension to express amid all its conflicts and varied emotions, in set phraseology, a certain state, often an uncertainty, amid such conflict, to the soul’s own consciousness. We think Mr. Foster takes the middle, the correct ground. We think him right when he urges the soul never to make a profession beyond its present consciousness; when he shows that faith is not realization, though immediately connected with it, and we think this chapter will shed much light and comfort into many perplexed and struggling minds.

33. See for example Merritt’s comments on this head in Foster, *Christian Purity*, 1851, 136.
34. Instead, the only reference to Foster’s work appeared when the *Guide* reprinted the “general discussion on the subject of Holiness,” by Rev. Dr. Jesse Truesdell Peck (1811-1883), who had authored what can be only loosely described as a “review” of Foster’s work for the pages of the *Methodist Quarterly Review* (October, 1851). Peck begins his twenty-four-page review by praising Foster’s work as “a book for the times” but then he hastens to add that Foster’s writing style contains many “blemishes” (505). Having allowed an entire page for these comments, Peck proceeds to present his own views on the subject. The result is twenty pages of rambling by Peck, all of which is to make the single point that holiness is “the central idea of Christianity.” Not surprisingly, a few years later Peck expanded these comments, resulting in the publication of his most popular book, *The Central Idea of Christianity* (Boston: Henry V. Degen, 1858). The remainder of the review is given to a few select quotes from Foster’s work, each followed ironically by Peck’s lament, “We regret that we have not room for other extracts from the excellent book” (527–28). As a result, the only editing that Peck had to do was to remove the four pages which actually mentioned Foster and his work (*Guide to Holiness*, Vol. XXII, 33ff).
The depth and severity of the controversy can be illustrated by the actions of the General Conference of 1852, which, in its pastoral letter to the local churches, felt it necessary to check what were viewed as innovations, stating:

We advise you, in speaking or writing of holiness, to follow the well-sustained views, and even the phraseology employed in the writings of Wesley and Fletcher, which are not superseded by the more recent writers on this subject. Avoid both new theories, new expressions, and new measures on this subject, and adhere closely to the ancient landmarks. 37

Unfortunately, such advice did little to clarify the issue since it begged the larger question as to which side was adhering most closely to these "ancient landmarks." In this regard, Raser's trenchant analysis of the sources for Palmer's unique presentation of the way of holiness is most helpful. Raser makes a compelling case that, in this instance at least, Palmer was influenced more by her personal experience and by Wesley's heirs than by the founder of Methodism himself. As to the personal side, Palmer's affective faculties were throughout her life somewhat stunted, with the result that she failed to achieve the type of emotional conversion experience which would provide her with the "witness of the Spirit" and definitively seal her salvation. Hence, she was unable to feel saved. 38 By contrast, Phoebe's sister, Sarah, could point to a definitive conversion experience, but she too could not feel the operations of divine grace as she longed to, or as she thought she should. Sarah's breakthrough finally came in 1835 when, upon reading some pages from The Life of Hester Ann Rogers, Sarah's eyes fell upon these words: "Reckon yourself dead, indeed, unto sin and thou art akin to God from this hour. O, begin, begin, to reckon now: fear not, believe, believe, and continue to believe. . . ." 39 Although Sarah never received credit for it, Raser contends that "Sarah's 'discovery' became the catalyst for the resolution of Phoebe's long-standing internal conflict over assurance and Christian perfection even though Phoebe did not reach a settled peace until two years after Sarah." 40

On the doctrinal side, notes Raser, Palmer was heavily influenced by John Fletcher and two of his followers, Hester Ann Rogers and William Carvosso, as well as Adam Clarke. From these sources Palmer inherited a mechanistic presentation of entire sanctification which viewed the spiritual universe as ruled by fixed laws of cause and effect. To achieve the desired end, one had to adhere meticulously to the directions given in the textbook

38Palmer confesses that she frequently "felt like weeping because she could not weep." Phoebe Palmer, The Way of Holiness, With Notes by the Way (New York: W. C. Palmer, 1867), 74.
40Raser, 45.
of the spiritual universe, the Bible. Having met the conditions laid down therein—foremost of which was entire consecration of oneself to God—the seeker of sanctification had the assurance that the “altar sanctifieth the gift.” Hence, knowledge that one had exercised “naked faith” in the “naked promises” provided an objective “witness of the Spirit” which superseded any subjective “feeling” of sanctification one might experience. Palmer appears to go beyond her predecessors, however, in her stress on publicly testifying to the blessing of full sanctification. Indeed, she makes confession into one of the mandatory “conditions” for obtaining and retaining the blessing.41

For his part, Foster would agree that once the necessary conditions were met, Christian purity would follow. However, following Wesley, Foster held that only God could know when the requisite conditions were met, after which He would verify its reception by sending the “witness of the Spirit.” Since it is a subjective state, neither Wesley nor Foster is entirely precise as to what it would entail, only that one would know the witness when one received it. In sum, then, Foster viewed entire sanctification as goal and prospect, while Palmer saw it as something to be claimed and confessed.

Given the sharp differences between their respective presentations of entire sanctification, why did the public controversy between the two end with the publication of Palmer’s open letter of November 1851 instead of escalating into open warfare as it did in the case of Mattison? It is hard to carry on a war when one of the parties fails to show up, but perhaps the best reason lies in the numerous friendships which Foster and Palmer shared.42 Clearly, any escalation of the conflict would have meant the wounding of many innocent loved ones. Consequently, the warfare which transpired between Mattison and Palmer can be viewed as a conventional war, with Palmer relying mainly on her generals for defense, whereas the mutually assured destruction of many mutually held friendships became a strong deterrent to any expansion of the conflict between the bishop and the elect lady. The result was still a war, but of the more modern “cold war” variety.

41 Raser, 197.
42 Among the more important of these dearly held friendships were Matthew Simpson, Edmund Janes, Alfred Cookman, and John McClintock.